Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, January 10, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MIDWINTER SEASONINGS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

This is the time of year when family appetites often become a serious problem. This is the time of year when meals are likely to grow monotonous and appetites dull. So the cook and the menu-maker needs to take extra thought and care in making the plain simple everyday foods especially inviting. This is especially necessary when the family pocketbook limits the choice of foods.

Once you have the food values provided for, flavor is the big point to consider. For flavor is the great appetite-reviver -- flavor and the looks of food. At this time of year you'll want to make the most of the natural flavor in each food. And then you'll want to know how to touch up dishes with a little skillful seasoning.

If your food budget is limited, you'll be especially interested in using the cheapest seasonings for the main course at the meal. These are: salt, pepper, meat drippings, onions, garlic, vinegar, sugar. The trick is to make the most of them as well as of the natural flavors in the food.

You may think that everybody knows how to use salt in food. But that doesn't seem to be the case. Many a dish is spoiled by a little too much salt. Many a dish tastes flat because it hasn't enough. The good cook uses salt discreetly and in almost every dish. Yes, the good cook even uses salt in apple-sauce and cake and pudding, because salt brings out flavor. Many people use a little salt on grapefruit and melon, on apple or banana. That's because this little trace of salt brings out the natural flavor of the fruit. In starchy food like breakfast cereal, rice or potatoes, you use more salt, for here salt adds flavor. It complements the bland flavor of the food itself. The foods people at the Bureau of Home Economics say: "Cook your cereals and vegetables in salted water to get the best diffusion of salt and therefore the best flavor."

Next to salt among the cheap seasonings, we usually depend on fat of some kind. Salt pork which has a salty flavor and a meat flavor combined is an old favorite. But this year salt pork is not as inexpensive a seasoning fat as it has been other years. Many vegetable fats are cheaper. But, if you save drippings, you can use them as you do salt pork -- to season greens, or string beans or cabbage.

Bacon drippings especially have a salty, smoked flavor that makes them good for browning potato cakes, for frying sliced cooked potatoes, mush, liver, some kinds of fish, rice fritters or even sliced apples. By the way, ham fat, or fat from the cured picnic shoulder has just as fine a flavor as the bacon for seasoning or for gravy. Drippings from beef roast make good shortening for

the famous Yorkshire pudding that goes with British roast beef. And beef drippings make good sauce or gravy. By the way, to use your drippings to best advantage, keep the different kinds in different jars. And keep them in the refrigerator, or the coolest place you have. Otherwise, they will soon turn rancid.

Sugar, like salt, is useful both for bringing out the flavor in a food and for adding taste -- in this case, adding sweetness. A little sugar along with salt in tomatoes gives a flavor most people like. The sugar seems to develop that natural fine flavor of the tomatoes. A little sugar, please notice-too much spoils the tomatoes. Some people also like a pinch of sugar in corn or peas or lima beans.

The Germans and other Central European people make the most of sour seasonings. They use vinegar for flavoring meats and vegetables. Sauerbraten or sour beef is a famous German dish. It is really beef pickled and cooked with vinegar. The acid not only gives flavor but helps make the meat tender. Sour cabbage is another German favorite. And sweet-sour beets are popular. Many of these good dishes we Americans enjoy and this is the time of year to feature them. A good recipe for sweet-sour red cabbage calls for a little fat, some brown sugar, vinegar, and chopped tart apple.

Onions and garlic, two of our most popular and most inexpensive seasonings, are often abused but can be of great help in varying the winter menu. But don't overdo these two seasonings. Play safe and use them generally in small amounts. In soups and stews, browning the onion first in fat often gives an especially good flavor. As for garlic, often the best way to use it is simply to rub the surface of the pan with it.

Herbs and spices are really a story in themselves. Generally, a blend of spices makes a finer and more subtle seasoning than using just one kind. And always the dish tastes better if you use these spices discreetly -- in small amounts. Pepper is one of the least expensive spices. Black pepper and white pepper come from the same plant -- in fact, from the same berry, or peppercorn. The outer coat of this berry makes black pepper. The inner coat makes the milder white pepper. Cayenne red pepper is the fruit of a plant much like our common garden variety of pepper but hotter. And Mexican chili peppers are hotter still. Use pepper according to your own taste for hot seasoning. But keep it tightly covered on the shelf if you want to keep the flavor.

Curry costs more than many of the commoner seasonings, but it is an excellent spice for giving variety to low-cost foods. Curry powder is a mixture of spices, long used in India and the East, but only in recent years in general use in temperate climates. The mixtures vary, but curry powder, as commonly sold in this country, contains turmeric, coriander seed, black and cayenne pepper, ginger lime juice, fenugreek seed, and cumin. (No, I don't know how to pronounce all those strange names for spices, and if you want to, you're welcome to correct me. Curry is so different from other seasonings that it gives a different taste to left-over dishes of meat, fish or vegetables. Of course, you know that traditionally, you always serve rice with or in a curry dish.

Well, in general, the points about seasoning are these: first, don't use too much of any seasoning; second, wherever possible bring out the natural flavor of the food; third, salt and sugar in very small amounts are good for bringing out flavor; finally, vary your flavors from day to day.

#######